

# THE MIDLAND

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

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VOL. IX

NOVEMBER, 1923

NO. 11

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## THE BATTLEGROUND

By ROLAND ENGLISH HARTLEY

Nettie Armstead had been married five years when her baby was born. She had longed for it intensely, but Joe always said that it was sheer cruelty to bring a child into such a world. Now that the child was coming, Joe treated the matter disdainfully, as if she had shown a willful neglect of his teachings and desires. Yet she was happy. She hoped that the child would be the means of bringing Joe back to a warmer view of life. She visioned herself lifting the baby to him in her arms so that, if only for a moment, the tight lines should relax about his mouth.

Right now it was her concern that the father's sullenness should not harm her child even before it was born. She struggled to preserve about herself a bright aura of cheer and serenity in the gloom and unrest of the home. Never before had she so realized the need of maintaining her individuality inviolate of her husband's. Her approaching maternity lifted her above him; always before she had felt herself incalculably beneath; now, her timid reverence for his mental powers was lost in the confidence that came of a deeper knowledge of herself.

With the lessening of her spiritual dependence upon Joe, came an unexpected deepening of her sense of nearness to him—a new understanding pity for what he lacked, and a more conscious gratitude for what he had

given her. She realized that if it wasn't for what she had learned from Joe, she wouldn't even know that she could give direction to the spirit of her child while it was still a part of herself. This knowledge gained from Joe she was using to fight against the bitterness that was Joe's sole harvest of all his learning. Here it was again, this bewildering complexity of things!

One Saturday evening, as she and Joe strolled before the importunate shop windows of Fillmore Street, a legless beggar thrust out to them a hatful of greasy pencils. They brushed past; but a few paces beyond, Nettie Armstead halted, sought the depths of her purse, and turned back to drop a coin into the patient hat.

"I don't want my child to be selfish," she explained to Joe.

He gave a hard chuckle. "So that was it? You'd rather have him the beggar, I suppose. . . . You don't seem to see that it's either one thing or the other."

She felt the fog of his pessimism settling over her. A few months before she would have yielded herself to its chilly darkness. But now she must struggle through, to let in the light to this other being. She forced herself into gaiety over the dubious allurements of a novelty store.

It was very difficult now to assert herself against Joe's intellectual hardness, after her years of crushed subservience to it. There had even been a time, she remembered, when she had exulted in this very quality of his. To her unformed mind he had appeared much as a god, knowing good and evil. All that she had sensed, in a dim inarticulate way, of the shams about her, he had put into clear unescapable words.

What a strange courtship theirs had been! Even now she could smile at the remarks the others used to make about them, those Sundays on the lawns of Golden Gate Park. While Clara and Lena tousled the hair of their young men, battered them with newspapers, or lay in

comfortable truce within their arms, she and Joe sat apart, and he talked to her. "Where does he get all that highbrow stuff?" Lena used to ask. The men approached him with the mingling of respect and disdain accorded to an alien species. Only Clara would assert, "He's a joy-killer; that's what *he* is."

Nettie had loved merriment as well as any of them, had loved music and dancing and bright lights. But there was an undertone of thoughtfulness in her nature that responded at once to Joe's eagerly questing mind. She felt flattered at his pouring out to her all the fruits of his new, unguided studies; and perhaps she assumed a greater responsiveness than was actual.

Looking back now, it was odd how untouched all his teachings had left her, though she seemed to be accepting them wholly. She found no mental obstacles to full belief in these theories that Joe expounded, and yet it was as if they referred to another world. She never took them to herself. She accepted with enthusiasm Joe's account of the geological history of the earth without relinquishing in the slightest her opinion that it was formed in the traditional six days. She admitted the likelihood of man's descent from the lower animals without prejudice to her belief in Adam and Eve. She even did not flinch at the inevitable conclusion of Joe's materialism, and yet held fast to a Divinity in her and about her. Of none of these reservations was she conscious; they merely lingered in the depths untouched by Joe's late-acquired fanaticism of reason.

Lena once said to her, "You certainly put up a good bluff of being interested in that line of his." When Nettie insisted that her interest was not pretended, Lena burst out, "You don't think *your* ancestors were monkeys, do you? Maybe *his* were, he's that big and dark. But you never got them blue eyes and that gold hair from no monkey."

Perhaps it was the girls' shocked concern that added a

sentimental piquancy to Nettie's interest in Joe. At any rate she married him, about the time that Lena assumed the direction of the affairs of the dapper shoe-clerk, and Clara settled her affections upon the milkman. Clara's husband was at home only while Clara was at work, so that they saw little of each other except Sundays; and after about a year of Sundays they decided they were seeing too much of each other, and separated. Since then Clara had married a plumber, who was nearly always home with time to spare for bullying her.

Nettie saw little of them nowadays. Marriage with Joe, she had soon found, meant an abandonment of friendships. Joe held the belief that selfishness was the mainspring of all human actions. He pointed out to her so constantly the self-interest involved in all advances toward friendship with them that she at length found it more comfortable to relinquish the friends than engage in ceaseless championship of them. When she showed Joe that many of his own actions couldn't be traced to selfishness, he merely grunted, "Then I'm a bigger fool than the rest of them, that's all."

They never quarrelled. Joe's opinions being presented as natural laws, she felt the futility of opposition. If he had undertaken to defend the justice of any of these laws, then she would have been roused to revolt; but his attitude of bitter scorn toward this scheme of things in which they were both caught, put him beside her as a fellow-sufferer, for whom one could feel only pity.

Joe was "good to her", too. He was even tender in his own rather repressed fashion. But this wasn't enough, she found. Sometimes she thought that Clara's marriage portion of blows and buffoonery and heedless abandonment to life would be more endurable than her own sheltered bondage of gloom. Yet gradually she had accepted it as the unescapable condition of her life. If she did not laugh any more, neither did she waste time crying about it.

And now the fight had to be made all over again, for the child's sake. At first she had shrunk from the effort: it was so much easier to stand things as they were than to struggle to change them. But the quickening of new life within her brought a responsive stirring of her old courage, her old aspiration toward the light. She withdrew from Joe's world into her own.

It was a world at first but scantily furnished. Her own possessions, she found, had been thrust back into dark dusty corners by the aggressiveness of those that she had meekly accepted from Joe. Now that she intended to be again mistress of her domain, she set herself to burnishing the fragile things that had been her own, setting them up tenderly among the scars and stains left by the cast-out intruders. Little by little her inner world became a place where it was pleasant to be.

She walked as often as she could in the Park, to regain whatever of her youth might still linger along its paths and lawns. She visited in the Museum pictures that once had pleased her. At home she brought forth the cobwebby box that held her high-school text-books. She read with delight that was mainly built on memory the poems that once had been meaningless as tasks.

One day as she was busy over the dishpan, Joe came to her holding out a slim gray battered volume. His tight lips had the sharp curl at one corner that stood for amusement. Nettie felt herself flushing hotly. This was the first time that she had forgotten to put out of sight this over-scrawled school copy of "Idylls of the King".

"You know why I'm reading it," she declared challengingly.

"Of course. But why this stuff?"

"I — it's beautiful, I think. I like it."

"It's nonsense." He let the leaves run swiftly under his finger. "I've been glancing at it. There was just one thing worth reading: 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new.'"

" 'And God fulfills himself in many ways,' " she continued.

He looked up at her sharply. She thought he was going to take up the challenge of the deity. But he shook his head slowly.

"In many ways? You may think so, Nettie; but there's only one thing that counts, and that's strength."

She turned about to face him, leaning back on her hands against the sink-board.

"Don't you believe," she begged, "that there's any use in beauty and — and — all the things like that?"

His lip curved up sharply again, but there came too the look of suffering in his eyes that made her pity him, love him, even while she hated the things he said.

He lifted the little gray volume slightly. "I read this once myself. I thought it was fine. . . . Maybe I wouldn't be so hard now if I hadn't been so soft then. . . . After you've been tricked and fooled and beaten, you begin to hate lies. Even the beautiful lies. The more beautiful they are, the more they weaken you."

He dropped the book on a chair. "Read it if you want, Nettie," he said, gently.

She gave her wet hands a wring in the apron and stepped closer to lay them on his shoulders.

"Oh, I wish —," she began.

But his eyes were as hard as his mouth now. "We're not going to make a weakling of our child," he warned her.

When she turned back to the sink she was hoping that their child would be a girl.

But it was a boy that was born. They named him David.

She had feared for her baby the father's indifference, or even dislike. It was a relief, and yet disconcerting, to note his attitude of amused interest toward his son. He would lean over the little sleeping figure with an expression of detached merriment and then look up with a chuckle to meet her anxious gaze.

"I never knew babies were so funny," he would say.

It hurt her, but she would laugh and answer, "Yes; look at his wrinkly little hands."

Later, he liked to hold the baby, always with that expression of one taking part in a monstrous joke.

"Made in the likeness of God!" he burst out one day, and laughed aloud for the first time in years.

Even the baby's crying amused him. "He's found out already what kind of a world he's got into," Joe would say. But he said it without the old note of bitterness. Even when he remarked, as he often did, after a long look at the baby, "So this is the beginning of the immortal creature, Man" — even then Nettie could laugh almost happily. She believed that his irony covered an actual tenderness toward the child; that he assumed it to hide the passing of a speedily abandoned pessimism.

Then, when the baby was about seven month old, Joe lost his job.

He said nothing about it when he came home that evening; but when dinner was half over he left the table noisily and began pacing the floor. His mumblings about "that twenty thousand" let Nettie guess what had happened. She sank back miserably in her chair.

"That twenty thousand dollars" had been a frequent subject of conversation with them. The importing firm for which Joe worked had made a gift of that sum to its president the previous Christmas. "Poor fellow's only got about a million," Joe had remarked. "He must need this money to build a hot-house for his orchids. . . . Too bad they forgot the rest of us; we might all have had a share if the company was so keen on dodging taxes."

The hot-house of Joe's fancy could scarcely have been completed, when the company began to let men go. Business was falling off. "They've got to get back that twenty thousand," Joe used to say; but he never seemed to think that part of it might be drawn from him; or if he did, he kept silent — and it was not like Joe to keep gloomy forebodings to himself.

"They talk about faithful service to your employers," he was muttering now. "And your employer sucks your blood in good times and throws you out on the street in bad."

Nettie knew better than try to break into the violence of his mood. But later, when the baby was tucked in the crib and lay with two fat fists beside his head, ready for sleep, she called from the bedroom door, "Don't you want to say good-night to Davie, Joe?"

He did not answer, nor raise his head from his hands.

When she had turned down the light she went out to him and laid her hand on his hair.

"I'm sure it'll be all right, Joe," she said.

He looked up slowly. "Anyway, the poor kid's not going to be raised on lies like I was."

She moved away from him abruptly. This brought her more fears than his loss of work.

It was five months before Joe found anything to do. Their savings were sufficient to carry them easily over the time; but there was the constant worry lest the period of waiting should stretch out too long; and for Joe there was the disheartenment of the fruitless search: the answering of ads, the standing in line, the delayed decisions, the jostling of fifty needy men for one meager job. Of course he was at home a great deal, witness of all the petty household problems. Nettie, trying to hide from him this aggravating domestic mechanism, found the burden of it almost intolerable. And Joe was growing morose, saying harsh little things that he probably forgot the next minute, while she brooded over them for days. Of the child's presence, he seemed hardly conscious, so deeply sunk in his own anxiety and bitterness. Nettie bathed and dressed and fed the baby before his eyes while he looked on with as little interest as if she were washing the dishes or making the bed.

After something more than five months of this, he was taken on as warehouse man by a large retail grocery firm

that had known of him while he was in the store-room of the importers. His renewed activity made no perceptible difference in his attitude toward life; months of brooding over social injustice had marked him too deeply for a mere momentary personal prosperity to alter his bitterness.

But at least the grind of worry was lifted, and one result of this was that he began to notice David again. David was tottering about the house now, and Joe would call the child to him evenings, lift him to his lap, and talk to him lengthily. It was such a commentary on human affairs as probably no child before had ever listened to — a mildly expressed, bitterly sarcastic arraignment of every existing institution. Joe would laugh loudly at the child's earnest attention to this talk that would have been unintelligible to many a man; and then David would chuckle appreciatively, as if they had just come upon a comical passage in this amazing tale.

"Even if he doesn't understand," Nettie would urge from the sink, "you ought not to talk to him that way, Joe."

"He'll understand quick enough," Joe always answered grimly.

Nettie never pressed her remonstrance, for fear of forcing Joe to too sharp and binding a statement of his purpose in the child's training. That was an issue she wanted to evade as long as possible. And she hoped that she was counteracting the possible effect of the father's teachings by her companionship with David through the day: the bright songs she sang him, the gay little stories she told, the day-long tender chatter of a mother to her child.

One thing that she wanted to do for David was almost constantly in her mind. Once, during Joe's time of idleness, she had mentioned baptism to him; and the tone of his "No" still kept her fearful of again seeking his consent. Month after month she put it off, day after day

trying to compel herself to brave his anger or his scorn. David was nearly two years old, well on with his first groping attempts at self-expression, when one night the courage came to her.

She set down knife and fork and began precipitately, "Won't you let me have him christened, Joe?" Before he could answer she hurried on to make every possible conciliating surrender. "I won't ask for him to go to Sunday school, or to church. But I've got to have him christened, Joe. I can't be happy without that. Won't you, Joe?"

"It can't hurt him any," Joe said slowly.

She was so tense and ready for struggle that the easy victory brought a flood of tears. He hated that sort of senseless thing. As she got up to hurry from the room, she heard him say, "You mustn't expect me to have anything to do with it."

There was a pastor at the little shingled church on Grove Street who understood the situation without too much questioning; and Clara and Lena with their husbands offered an ample choice of godparents.

On the night following the ceremony, when David was fussy at table, Joe admonished him, "You mustn't do that, David. Remember, you have renounced the devil and all his works."

Quite as if he understood, the boy stated with a pout, "A man threw water on me."

"It was very impressive, I'm sure," his father answered.

"You know he doesn't understand," Nettie broke in. "Are you doing it just to hurt me?"

Their glances held together over the table. Then Joe got up and went out into the hall. Nettie followed him, ran her hand under his arm, and laid her face against his sleeve.

"Joe," she began, but he interrupted, "I'm sorry, Nettie. I just want to do what's right by the boy. I want him to understand."

The evening talks were not continued after this — those talks in which humanity appeared as a grotesque race of animals wearing the masks of gods. Nettie decided that Joe had thought better of his plan of training the boy to misanthropy. She grew more open in her own ministering to the child's awakening mind. By allusions in the evening to their games and stories of the day, she tried to win Joe over to a share in all these fascinating provinces of thought. One night at dinner it was Santa Claus who emerged from the talk.

"There is no Santa Claus, David," his father told him.

"Joe!" Nettie called out sharply.

"Mama and papa will give you those blocks and the book," Joe went on calmly. "But there is no Santa Claus."

"I want Santa Claus to bring them," David insisted.

"There is no such person as Santa Claus, I tell you." Joe raised his voice. "When parents tell their children there is a Santa Claus, they are telling lies."

Nettie felt her face flaming. "That's a mean thing to tell him," she burst out.

"I told you we weren't going to raise him on lies," Joe reminded her.

The knowledge thus imparted to David soon had other consequences than his disillusionment. Only a few nights later he announced at dinner, "I told Robbie there was no Santa Claus and he took my cap and he threw it up in the tree."

"And what did you do?" his father demanded.

"I cried."

"You little coward! You take his cap tomorrow or you hit him. Do you understand? If you don't, you won't get any dinner."

"He's big," David began to whimper.

"I don't want him to fight, Joe," Nettie ventured timidly.

"We won't argue about it," he returned. "You heard what I said, David."

The next night David admitted tearfully that he hadn't taken his revenge on Robbie. He was sent supperless to the bedroom. Nettie got up from the table at once, leaving Joe to have his meal alone. When he had gone into the front room, she called David out and set his warmed porridge before him. While he was sniffing over it, Joe appeared in the doorway. Nettie stepped toward him.

"He's got to have something to eat," she challenged.

"I'll fight him tomorrow," David was whimpering behind her. "Sure I will, papa."

True to his promise he was able the following evening to report a violent but apparently indecisive battle. His cheeks were very red and his eyes flashing as he recounted its progress. While he talked, he gulped his food nervously, and immediately after dinner was taken with a fit of nausea and put to bed feverish and excited.

"I'm afraid he's going to be sick," Nettie said when she came out of the bedroom.

"Nonsense," Joe grunted. "He's not going to be sick. Next time he won't be so excited."

"You're going to make him keep on fighting?"

"Every time anybody tries to slip anything over on him. He's going to learn to look out for himself. He's got to be *strong*; that's a man's only chance in life."

This was henceforth the burden of the father's teachings to his son: "Everybody's against you. You've got to fight for what you get all your life. If you can't fight, you go down and out."

It was not a teaching congenial to the boy's spirit. He was naturally gentle, sensitive, tender. This streak of "weakness" Joe set himself to eradicate; and the mother found herself making more and more a secret of her contrary training. The child, she soon saw, was conscious of this antagonism between father and mother. With Joe, he was developing a secretive, sometimes almost sullen, manner. He was growing afraid of his father. Nettie watched closely that his fear shouldn't lead him to

deceptions. "You must tell papa what happens when you're out playing just like you do mama," she urged him, trying to pull down the barrier that was growing up between David and Joe. But it was tacitly understood that their stories and games and fancies of the day were a realm into which the father could not enter, a realm even to be guarded against the blight of his intrusion.

Nettie marvelled even more than the child at the world of fancy she was building for him. Memories of stories told to her long ago, episodes of actual life, remembered bits of her limited reading, sheer make-believe — these were the materials from which she wove a glowing tapestry of story to cover over the grim outlines of Joe's world of struggle and hatred.

The boy's shrinking from his father's hardness drew him back constantly deeper into the comfort of this unreal world. Over and over again he demanded his favorite stories.

"Tell me about the lame boy," he begged one Sunday.

"I can't tell you any stories to-day, Davie. You know that."

He took the meaning of her eyes. "Papa's working out in the garden," he told her.

She glanced through the window and then dropped into the chair by the kitchen table. In a moment he was leaning against her knees. This was a story of which he never tired, a story Nettie had constructed from some dim memories whose source she could not trace. This morning she told it hastily, only the outline of it, fearful of interruption.

"This little lame boy lived years and years ago in a little town in France. In those days every town was a fort. Each town was the enemy of all the other towns. And always there was fighting. . . . The little lame boy was sad because he couldn't be a soldier. All his friends said they were going to be soldiers. And when

the town was attacked the boys would go to the walls to load the guns for the soldiers and to throw down stones on the enemy. . . . And one day the town where the boy lived declared war on another town and all the men marched out to battle. All the boys marched out too, and only the little lame boy was left. He cried all day because he was lame, and he thought it was better to be dead than not to be able to march out to battle.

"From the town they could hear the noise of the fighting. And at night, when it grew quiet, a wounded messenger came back from the army. He told that most of the men and boys of the town had been killed and the rest had fled to the hills. All night the women and the children wept. They knew that in the morning the enemy would come to take their homes. . . . And in the morning they could see the enemy coming closer, with the leader riding ahead on a tall white horse. The little lame boy crept out of the back-door of his house and stumbled on his crutches down to the town gate and out along the broad causeway that led down to the plain. When the man on the great white horse was near, the boy held up one crutch and called out, 'You have killed all our men and boys; now will you kill our women and babies?' The bearded man on the horse laughed down at him and asked, 'What of yourself? You say I have killed all of the boys.' The boy's face grew very red and he shouted, 'If this crutch was a sword you wouldn't taunt me.' 'What would you do with a sword?' the man asked. 'I would stand at the gate,' said the boy, 'and protect our women and babies.' The great man sat silent a moment. Then he said, 'I do not fight against the defenceless. Your crutch is more powerful than a sword.' He rode rapidly back to his followers, and the little lame boy watched them all turn about and march away into the broad yellow plain."

They sat silent when the tale was ended. Then Nettie felt the boy start and saw his frightened eyes turned to-

ward the porch door. She didn't have to look to know what it was.

"No wonder he's getting to be such a weakling if that's the sort of stuff you're feeding him on." Joe's voice had the deep note of his rare anger against her.

She pushed the boy quickly away from her. "Run out into the garden, Davie. I want to talk to papa."

But when he was gone she had no time to speak before Joe went on in that slow calm way, "How is he ever going to learn what's real in life if you teach him such lies?"

She sprang up now and faced him.

"They're not lies, Joe. You think that all the truth there is, is in what you tell him. But there must be some other kind of truth. I'm sure of it. And yours — what good does it do you?" She stepped closer to him and reached out to touch his arm. "You're not happy, Joe — are you?"

He laughed harshly and turned his eyes away from her. "Certainly not; I'd think I was going crazy if I was."

"You're not happy, and yet you're trying to make Davie just like you."

He faced her gravely now. "No, Nettie; you're wrong about that. I want to save him from being like I am. I was trained just as you're trying to train him: to think that the world was a kind, pleasant place; and when I had it beaten into me what a miserable mess it all is, then I — well, maybe I was driven to the extreme. But that's what we can save him from. Don't tell him any more of those foolish stories — please, Nettie. We must make him strong by always letting him know the truth." The severity of the dogmatist was gripping him again. "He must be strong, Nettie. Strength is the only thing that counts."

She clung to him sadly. "Are you so sure, Joe?"

He smiled down at her indulgently. "I ought to know. I've seen the strong trampling on the weak often enough."

"And you want him to trample?"

"Which would you rather?"

She moved away from him with her hands held before her face.

And now there were no more stories for David, and all things ministered to his strength, until that frail strength lay for a mere instant beneath the wheels of a truck.

Nettie was sewing in the front room when she heard the excited voices of children and the clatter of steps on the stairs. She moved dizzily to the door. The leather-aproned man who carried David was crying, and talking on and on — words unheard at the time that droned afterwards in her brain through many an hour.

"I've got my own at home, ma'am. I won't never get over this. . . . It was the back wheel. I didn't see 'em come up behind. . . . I've got my own. . . . I know how it is, ma'am."

Some one had sent for a doctor and he was kneeling beside her, by the low sofa.

"He isn't — ?" she whispered.

His hands were moving swiftly over the limp little body. "No," he answered. But she thought he was deceiving her, David's face was so cold and white.

Then some one spoke to the doctor, and he lifted her to her feet.

"We can do better for him at the hospital," he said.

Already a man was carrying David to the door. She followed down the stairs to the ambulance. Afterwards, she often had a disturbing memory of leaving the house this way, open and full of strangers.

At the hospital they would not let her be with David. They carried him down the long hall while she had to stay in a narrow room across from the office, where she could see a girl endlessly moving plugs at the telephone board. A nurse stayed with her until Joe came.

She hid herself in his arms away from the sight of his grim white face. It came to her now how terrible this must be for Joe, who valued strength above all things.

The doctor came out to them at last. The boy would get along finely, he said, but they couldn't see him tonight. He called Joe aside for a moment before they left. At home, Joe sat silent for a long while before he told her, looking the other way, "They had to take off his leg, at the knee."

She went every day to the hospital. They let her stay a few minutes, stroking David's hand, pushing back his hair, trying to keep her eyes away from the lower part of the bed.

Joe did not see David at the hospital. Perhaps they would have let him come at night, but when Nettie suggested it he made no response. His face was growing grimmer every day. Nettie's heart ached for his suffering. She pressed close to him at night and prayed for his arms to come around her, that they might lessen each other's burden of sorrow. But Joe held himself alone with his suffering.

They brought David home at last. When he was in the familiar room alone with his mother, he said at once, "I want to get up and walk. I'm sick of being in bed."

"Oh, not yet, Davie. You — must rest a while."

"What you crying for?"

"I'm so glad to have you home again, my Davie."

When she met Joe at the door that night, she cautioned him, "He doesn't know yet. We mustn't let him know."

Joe's face frightened her. A loosing of its grim lines had left it haggard and worn, as if barriers of resistance had suddenly yielded.

"I'll go in and see him," Joe said.

She clung to his arm. "You won't tell him, Joe?"

He shook her off roughly. "I'll tell him what I please," he muttered.

"Joe!" She caught at him again. "Don't go in now. I'm afraid —. You mustn't bother him now."

He brushed past her with a quivering face. "I guess I can speak to my own son when I want to."

She followed to the bedroom doorway and saw David raise his usual frightened gaze to his father. It was all she could do to keep from crying out and running to stand between them. Joe was fingering the covers awkwardly.

"So you're home again," he began gruffly.

The boy stammered something, and suddenly Joe knelt beside the bed.

"Tell me — tell me the story of the lame boy, won't you, Davie?"

The child's face was lighted with a great happiness. Nettie met his gleaming eyes and moved swiftly forward. Then her glance fell on Joe's bent form by the bedside. She drew back gently and closed the door behind her.

After a while Joe came out. She was waiting there. She lifted her hands to his face.

"He has gained so much," she whispered.

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## MARCH MOOD

By NORA B. CUNNINGHAM

My mood was like water beaten to glittering by March  
winds.

The lapping waves made music on the rocks  
That shut them in. . . .

But now

The wind has fallen and the sun has set;  
The pool is still and pale beneath the stars,  
Hemmed in by implacable rocks.

## THE DOG-CATCHER

By BERTHA HELEN CRABBE

The dog-catcher never went to church. On Sunday mornings when the weather was fine he walked down to the river, sat on a log under the willows and watched the water or whittled a stick. He was thinking this Sunday morning as he walked along that he would make a willow whistle. He had always made willow whistles in the springtime when he was a boy. He would make one now. He thought about it until the idea became strangely glorified in his mind, confused warmly with the rare happiness, the shining romance and vivid imagination of boyhood. Through the agency of a willow whistle something wonderful was about to happen to him. He walked a little faster.

The dog-catcher was a significant figure in the town. He was a tall powerfully built man with a slight limp. A constant sense of his public, a sort of psychic awareness of what was expected of him, had made his green eyes hard and piercing, his chin heavy and aggressive. He had a blond mustache of scant, bristling hairs. He always wore thick cow-hide boots and ragged corduroy trousers of a dirty faded greenish-yellow. To-day as a concession to the Sabbath he had put on an ancient black swallow-tail coat. He had grown far too large for it. The seams were strained to zigzagging and his hands dangled heavily from the sleeves, revealing about three inches of hairy wrist. The dog-catcher's hands were curiously repulsive. Huge and thick with flesh, not a joint showing, they were of a strange treacherous smoothness with remarkably well-shaped nails. But for all their smooth, thick-fleshed appearance, they were deft and powerful. Sometimes in the course of his work it was necessary to break a dog's neck or to choke him. And he was very expert in the intricate cunning of a certain

quick strong twist of the net which will land a snarling, frantic dog upon its back, helplessly enmeshed.

There were people who hated the dog-catcher and people who feared him; he had no friends. But he was not entirely without admirers; there were the callow, pimply-faced youths who loafed on the corner of Main and Mill Streets, a few rough half-grown boys, and a sprinkling of foreign laborers who often came upon him engaged in his business as they went to work of a morning. The dog-catcher scorned this admiration, appraised it at its true sinister worthlessness. But he was always excessively conscious of his audience, and because his work was naturally spectacular an audience was rarely lacking. The admiration he despised but the condemnation which was almost general, the horror-stricken, fascinated eyes which followed his every move, somehow played complete havoc with his self-control, tricked him wickedly into many an extra kick or cuff or subtle little cruelty. So that he loathed himself and wondered fearfully at himself, and drove his yapping dogs to the pound, cursing bitterly under his breath.

The little children were the worst, though, those whose mothers frightened them into good behavior by threatening them with the dire fate of being carried off by the dog-catcher. They turned pale with fear when they saw him and scurried out of his path like rabbits. There was one little girl in particular, a sunny-haired lovable little thing, who would flee from him screaming, looking back over her shoulder with wide terrified eyes. Once he came upon her unawares, sitting on the sidewalk playing with a whole family of little sticks.

"Now you be good or the dog-ketcher'll get you," he heard her say.

Then she looked up and saw him. She gave a wild shriek, stumbled frantically to her feet, tripped and fell flat. The dog-catcher took her arm to help her up. With all her panic-stricken strength she tried to cling to the

sidewalk, her frantic little fingers digging into the earth, clutching impotently at twigs and pebbles. The dog-catcher loosed his hold upon her. He stood looking at her, his face drawn and livid. He could not endure this. It roused all the ugliness, the savagery in him. Suddenly he lifted his foot and kicked her, a swift light kick scarcely more than a touch. Then he went on down the street. And in a few minutes his big body began to shake uncontrollably, his eyes looked sick and hunted. He could not sleep that night nor the next, so tortured was he by a terrible loathing and fear of himself.

To-day he walked toward the river thinking of the willow whistle he would make. A glow of anticipation appeared in his green eyes. His shoulders straightened from their habitual stoop, his limp was hardly perceptible and he managed his long limbs with far less clumsiness than usual.

It was a beautiful day. Main Street was swept by a high, bright wind. Sparkles ran along the tossing limbs of the trees. The houses looked as fresh and dazzling as though they had been newly painted, and there were daffodils and hyacinths in the vivid green of the yards. Two church bells were ringing with an alternate windy tunelessness, and here and there were groups of people walking churchward, the women's Sunday skirts blowing out, the men's Sunday coat-tails fluttering.

The dog-catcher hummed beneath his breath. It was truly a beautiful morning, and he was going to make a willow whistle. Reaching the end of the street, he turned away from the boat landing and went along the river shore, crunching the pebbles under his feet with a keen enjoyment. At last he reached a place of overhanging willows. With a sigh of satisfaction he seated himself upon an old log. Delightedly he sniffed the muddy, low-tide smell of the river. He dug into the pebbles and let them fall, wet and shining, through his fingers. He looked out over the glittering water, his eyes half-closed

against the dancing sun-spots. He listened to the whisper and suck of the little waves that ran up the pebbly shore and receded. The good, sun-warmed peace of a fair Sunday morning lay all around him.

After a time he drew out his pocket knife in preparation for the making of the willow whistle. It took many minutes to select just the right twig. Then came the careful cutting, the trimming of the ends, the cutting of the mouth-piece and vent; after that the laborious tapping to loosen the peel. The dog-catcher tapped and tapped. The sun was warm upon his shoulders; he had a joyous excited feeling as though something of his happy, carefree boyhood were here, almost within his grasp, something infinitely rare and precious. . . . He tapped and tapped. He hoped it would be a good shrill whistle.

There was a sound of stealthy footsteps in the underbrush behind him. Here and there among the bushes appeared the round faces of little boys. Eyes sparkled with daring, grew large with amazement. A dog-catcher making a willow whistle!

Slowly, carefully the dog-catcher drew off the perfect sheath of the peel. Then after shaping the white, moist-shining bit of naked stick, he fitted the peel on again. He lifted the whistle to his lips. It was a moment of supreme importance, of thrilling expectation.

There came a sharp, quick gasp from the bushes back of the dog-catcher. He turned like a flash. The woods seemed full of little boys suddenly terrified, running, scrambling, falling, struggling frantically to get away. The dog-catcher watched them go. His face twisted slowly to a distorted, evil ugliness. Everyone ran from him, everyone feared him. He saw himself looming up out of the vast population of the world, a huge uncouth monster isolated in a persistent, clinging hideousness.

He sprang to his feet. With all his might he flung the whistle out into the river, his great strength slapping back against him with the feather weight. Then, swear-

ing viciously, he limped along the shore, crossed the boat landing and started up the street.

People were coming out of the churches now. Pushing sidewise, his head twisted aggressively like a bull's, he made his way among them. They shrank back, giving him a wide berth; they stopped chattering to look at him. His presence seemed to drag an invisible, darkening pall over the whole street, over people and houses and trees and flowers, over the very sun itself.

Just as he reached the group of people before the Methodist Church, five dogs suddenly gathered apparently from nowhere and flung themselves at him in a raging, snarling mass. Always he had to look out for this. The dogs never forgot, neither those which escaped him nor those which had been released from the pound upon payment of the required fine; they never forgot. No one ever forgot. . . .

He whipped out his braided quirt. He laid about him on all sides. He kicked with his heavy boots. The dogs yelped and bellowed and leaped at him. Women screamed. Men danced behind the struggling animals, watching for an opportunity to seize them. Someone was shrieking piteously, "Here, Teddy, Teddy! Come, Teddy! Teddy!"

The dog-catcher quelled the dogs by sheer viciousness. Dragging low, tongues hanging, eyes glittering, they slunk away. Then the dog-catcher stood still, the perspiration pouring down his face, the cruel blood-stained quirt hanging limp from one hand, his flashing green eyes fixed upon the terrified women peering out from the doorway of the church. With a lift of her shoulders as though she drew upon all her store of strength and resolution, one of the women suddenly started toward him. From a bundle of tracts in her hand-bag, she selected one and tremblingly thrust it into his hand. He glanced at it. "Be Kind To Your Dumb Friends." He smiled strangely. He turned on his heel and walked home.

The dog-catcher lived in a most innocent looking house. Such a bare, trig directness of line, such a gleam of pristine white paint and neat green blinds might have been the choice of a prim little spinster. There was even a delicate white-spindled fence, and along the tidy graveled path, a dainty border of English daisies. Inside, the rooms were bare but exquisitely clean. There were no carpets or rugs. When the dog-catcher walked around, his heavy cow-hide boots made a noise like clattering thunder. When he was not walking about, the house was very silent, dreadfully silent.

He sat down on the back porch now, and stared out over the sunny fields. He ached. The ache swirled up over his body like intolerable anger; it beat and throbbed like the welling of tears.

Suddenly he rose, limped across the yard and went up the road until he came to the dog pound. This was a large, wire-enclosed space before a stoutly built old barn. In the barn, the dogs unclaimed or for whom no fine was forthcoming were "put out of the way."

There were nine dogs in the yard to-day; most of them were lying down, stretched out to the warmth of the sunshine. But one, a quick, clean-cut toy fox terrier, was leaping at the wire fencing again and again with a sharp, quivering determination. It had probably been doing this at intervals ever since it was put in there the evening before, the dog-catcher thought. You would never find this type of dog stretched out obliviously in the sunshine when shut away from friends and environment. It was the most difficult type with which the dog-catcher had to deal. A heavy, sullen dog he could meet with its own brutish strength; it took quick thought, intuitive flashes of understanding and sympathy to deal with the type of the little terrier, and in these qualities the dog-catcher was sadly lacking. But the type had always piqued him, fascinated him, perhaps from the very fact that he could not conquer it.

He stood looking at the leaping terrier. He did not know whether he wanted to grasp that quivering little body in his hands, snap the delicate bones, twist the neck, see the ruby-bright blood, see the glaze of death in the eyes, or whether he wanted to hold the dog close and warm in his arms, have it snuggle against him, lick his hands with its flicking pink tongue. But he wanted something, he ached for it, ached for it!

He unlocked the gate, and holding his quirt in readiness, went in among the dogs. Those that had been sleeping rose growling and cringed away, their jaws snapping. The terrier paused, stood tense for a moment looking at the dog-catcher, then leaped at him like a flame, screaming. The man caught the dog, twisted it about in his arms helpless to bite, stepped out of the enclosure, locked the gate and strode off down the road, the little body twitching frantically against his side.

When he reached home, the dog-catcher closed the kitchen door and put the dog down. It crouched for an instant, panting, its tiny stick-like legs spread, its eyes flashing. Then again and again it leaped at the man but he beat it back with his quirt. It began to snap at his boots, yapping, screaming, jumping about wildly. The dog-catcher looked down at it, his lips twisted to a smile. For a long time it kept this up, alternately leaping at the dog-catcher and snapping at his boots. The man kept smiling that twisted smile.

At last the dog retreated backwards to a corner of the room and sat there panting, watching the man warily. Then the dog-catcher started slowly, crouchingly toward it, his green eyes points of smothered light, his hideous hands extended, the fingers tensing with a merciless lust for cruelty, for killing. People seemed to be behind him pushing him; the little girl who was always so afraid of him, the little boys who had scrambled to get away from him in the woods that morning, the women who had peered fearfully at him from the church doorway. They

were all pushing him, pushing him to do this thing. It was their fault. They expected it. They made him hideous, they drove him to evil. . . . Their fault.

The little dog watched him approach; it crouched lower and lower.

Suddenly the man stood still, his hands fell to his sides, he grew limp, he shook and trembled, and his Adam's apple worked up and down his throat in great gulps. *This* was not what he wanted! Great God, *this* was not what he wanted! Loneliness . . . that was what was the matter with him; loneliness — He standing out from all the vast population of the world, isolated in hideousness — alone — alone — He could not endure it.

He stumbled to the cupboard and picked a piece of cold baked chicken out of its congealed grease. He got down on his knees across the room from the little dog. He extended the bit of meat.

"Here, dog," he called. "Here, dog, dog!"

The dog sniffed distrustfully. It did not move.

"Dog! Dog! Come here!" The man's voice was hoarse with his need. The muscles of his face jerked. "Dog, come here! Come here!"

The dog winked rapidly, its nose quivered. But it did not move.

The dog-catcher crouched lower, he held the meat out further. "Come here, dog, doggie!"

The dog did not move.

The man hitched himself nearer with tense, impassioned jerks of his body. Perspiration streamed down his face. His breathing filled the room with a harsh, almost crackling sound.

"Come here, dog! Come, come!"

The dog did not move.

Suddenly the man plunged upright. He flung the meat at the dog with all his might. "D-damn you!" he stutted. "D-damn you!"

He sank down in a chair and sat there limply, staring

at the dog. The dog ate the meat, sniffed around the room, warily avoiding the man, and then began leaping at the door, its small quivering body striking and falling back, striking and falling back. The man watched.

Down the road, the bells began ringing for Sunday-school. Come, *come*, come, *come*. An automobile shot by the house trailing the sound of laughter.

After a time, the dog-catcher lurched to his feet, went to the cupboard and got another piece of meat. Then he began all over again, holding out the meat, hitching forward, calling desperately, "Dog, dog; come, dog!" It happened as before; the dog would not move; the man flung the meat at it in a rage.

Then the dog-catcher sat down and watched the dog. The terrier ate the meat and began to leap at the door again, its body striking and falling back, striking and falling back. At last it seemed exhausted. It threw itself down on the floor, its whole body palpitating, its bright eyes fixed upon the man.

The man got another piece of meat from the pantry. For the third time he went through the whole performance of desperate pleading. The dog did not even lift its head, but it watched. It left the meat untouched where the man flung it.

The man sat down in the chair once more. Slowly the time passed. The room began to fill with a clear rosy sunset light until it struck a blinding nakedness from the shining pans hung over the sink. Then it gradually faded. Darkness crept into the room. Stars looked in at the windows. The man could see only the flash of quick, hostile, unconquered eyes watching, watching —

Suddenly the dog-catcher stumbled to his feet. He rushed out of doors, his great hands waving grotesquely above his head. "My God!" he shouted to the stars, "My God!" And his voice was hoarse with agony. He caught up an axe from beside the steps. He hurried into

the kitchen, swung the axe over his head. But he did not strike. The axe crashed to the floor.

He almost ran to the cupboard and again he picked a piece of meat out of the platter. He crouched down, he fell to his knees. He started across the floor on his knees, calling, "Come, dog! Come, dog! Come!"

The dog did not move.

"Dog, dog! Oh, dog, come, come!"

The dog did not move.

The man stopped crawling. Suddenly he let himself lunge forward upon his face. He lay there curiously flat, loosely outspread.

Someone went by the house whistling "Yankee Doodle".

The dog-catcher lay motionless. A supreme black loneliness accumulated through many days and weeks and years pressed down upon him, held him flat so that he could not fight it, could not move. He lay there pressed flat, scarcely room for breath, scarcely room for life; room only for loneliness. . . .

The little dog lifted its head. Its sensitive nose quivered, its eyes were wary. Slowly it dragged itself to its feet. Slowly, straining backward in constant readiness to spring away, it walked over to the man. It circled him daintily, sniffing. It ate the meat that had fallen from the man's hand. It sniffed at his greasy clenched fist, then licked it a little. It walked around him again tentatively, sniffing. Then it walked away, went around the room, its tiny nails clicking on the bare boards, walked slowly back to the man, and with a sigh curled down against him.

## LATE OCTOBER

By CHARLES CAIN

"Hadn't you better have a light, dear?"

Regretfully Mr. Carey turned his Cellini over, open, on his knee, sighed, blinked a little and said,

"Eh? . . . Oh, did you speak, Maggie?"

Mrs. Carey, who had waited patiently for this question, looked up from her knitting.

"Yes, dear. It's rather dark for reading, isn't it?"

"Why . . . yes." Mr. Carey took his glasses off and wiped them with absent proficiency, meanwhile stretching his eyelids apart and squeezing them together. Then he sighed again.

"Yes," he admitted, "it is pretty dark." And after putting his handkerchief away and carefully adjusting his glasses, he lifted the book, looked at it reflectively a moment, put it face down on the table, pushed himself from the chair and waddled, briskly if unathletically, into the next room. Mrs. Carey subconsciously noted the anticipated slight grunt, the faint scratching of her husband's fingers in the match-box, the slapping of his slippers on the kitchen linoleum, the padding on the carpet as he reentered the room.

He stopped, matches in hand, and stood looking at his wife. The late evening light from the window struck his gray-fringed bald head, making a sort of halo above his mild serious face and dim short portly figure.

"Don't you care to go out for a stroll this evening, Maggie?"

Mrs. Carey looked out the window and then dubiously at her husband.

"Well-l . . ." she said, "wouldn't you . . . I thought you hadn't finished your reading, dear . . ."

Mr. Carey fiddled with his matches. Then he glanced at his book, murmured, "Knitting, knitting, always knitting," walked over to the gas jet, stood a moment irreso-

lute, and added, looking very earnestly through the window: "The evenings are getting pretty cool now; and you always complain of the night air, Maggie." Then standing on tiptoe and stretching his short legs and arms and his round body, he jerked the key of the gas jet with his left hand and by a violent twist of his body lit the gas with his right. A few more jerks and twists brought the dancing light to the desired brightness; and Mr. Carey, having glanced round the familiar little book-filled room, full of brown shadows, let his eyes rest on the shiny glasses behind which his wife's face was a mild blur, grey-crowned, and waited.

"I guess it's as good as it *can* be," she decided, studying the light. "We need a new mantle pretty soon though."

Mr. Carey sat down, crossed his knees luxuriously, and picked up his book. But after gazing at it a moment he looked at the window again and remarked:

"Yes, it's getting quite cool; quite cool. Not many more walks this season, I'm afraid, Maggie. We'll have to think of something else for you."

"Well," said Maggie pleasantly, "you can read and smoke your pipe, and I've got lots of knitting to tend to."

Mr. Carey did not say anything. He had settled himself very comfortably, and was deep in Cellini. But a long time afterward he closed the book, very slowly and with an effort, as if he were squeezing his attention from between the pages by muscular pressure, sighed heavily, took his glasses off again, and rubbed his eyes.

His wife's hands lay idle upon her knitting. Her eyes were closed; her face leaned forward, relaxed in weariness. Without her customary bright primness she looked much older. Mr. Carey gazed at her rather vacantly, then rose and by another violent stretch turned off the light. After this he blinked at his wife for a few seconds, until his eye was drawn to a patch of window, faintly pink; stooping, he peered out, tiptoed past Mrs. Carey, opened the door softly, and stepped onto the porch.

It was a whispering October night. The moon burrowed in clouds, turning them over in slow-moving rolls. An unreal glow clung eerily to the hills and, northward, silhouetted the steeples of Warrell. In the yard, dead leaves stirred fitfully in dimness. Mr. Carey, hands in pockets, feet apart, shoulders hunched forward, face upturned and squinting a little, gazed at the clouds while the light breeze played with his scant hair and cooled his bald crown. His eyes roamed absently over Warrell's jagged outline, blinked at the distant city lights, and rested on the nearer rays that streamed into the dusk from windows of his scattered neighbors. Now and then would come a sound of closing doors, of lockings and boltings in the distance, and lights would vanish. But Mr. Carey remained, gazing at the rolling clouds.

His wife's voice startled him.

"Goodness, John, I was so frightened, in there in the dark! I must have been asleep. How long have you been out here?"

Her husband sighed very deeply, and tried to focus his mind on her question. But she did not wait for an answer.

"It kind of looks like rain," she observed. Her husband grunted; and as he made no comment on any of her remarks, she went indoors and lighted the gas.

"Coming, dear?" she called; and when he had come in, blinking grumpily in the light, she inquired affectionately:

"Why, John, dear, I don't believe you've had your pipe yet, have you?"

Mr. Carey blinked silently, debating a question: whether to renounce pipes for all time and stalk off to bed, or to open genial discourse with a gay witticism. He did neither. He merely said "No" rather tonelessly and walked over to the pipe rack.

"You're tired, dear," his wife said softly. "Your pipe will soothe your nerves. You're used to it, you know."

Again Mr. Carey considered declaring independence of pipes. Through forty-five years of smoking he had retained a slight dread of tobacco, and still approached it gingerly, as he did horses. But the evening pipe was a sort of ritual, a sacrifice to a youthful, perhaps also literary, ideal; so he took down a meerschaum and filled it, stoically, under his wife's fond gaze.

She watched him intently until he had finished the delicate business of lighting; then, seeing him puffing evenly, she relaxed and opened conversation.

"I saw little Dolly Whitley up to Warrell to-day. It's a shame, such a nice little girl, used to be, anyway, and now she paints up so. I wouldn't have known her. But I guess they all do nowadays. It's a pity." She waited for corroboration, and comment on the folly of youth.

"Well," demanded Mr. Carey after several puffs, "why shouldn't they? If paint adds to the enjoyment of youth, let 'em paint." He looked toward the window, and out at the blackness. "Quietly, deceitfully, youth drifts by," he said, thinking of the rolling clouds. "It seems to be still, immutable, eternal; but under your very eyes it's sailing by. It's here: it's gone; it laughs at you. . . . What is life anyhow, but Youth? Youth with a tail."

He got up abruptly, knocked a great deal of good tobacco out of his pipe, put the pipe in the rack, and went out to lock up the toolhouse.

Mrs. Carey, disconcerted, went upstairs to bed. Later her husband followed, and began to undress in the dark.

"By the way," he remarked presently, "what was the name of that young fellow — you know — I used to run around with at school? Larry — Larry . . . ."

"Merton?"

"Why, yes, Merton, of course. Funny I forgot it. But I wasn't thinking of him especially. That is, well, there was old — old — Kinwick, and Smeltzer, and, and . . . well, lots of youngsters . . ."

"Well? What about them?"

"Oh," said Mr. Carey, trying to yawn, "well, I suppose some of them are married, and maybe some are dead, and all that."

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Carey dubiously.

"And probably," continued Mr. Carey, very casually, "you often think of the girls. Let's see now, there used to be, oh, what were their names? Sally . . . Peters and Irma what's-her-name, and . . . Very likely they're all dead, or married, or moved away from Griggs, or something."

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Mr. Carey crawled into bed and arranged the covers carefully.

"Old Herrick, I'm sure he's been taken off by some woman. And . . . by the way . . . that little girl you used to . . . point out sometimes — I never can think of her name — the little brown-haired girl, quiet and . . . oh, she had sort of delicate features . . ."

"I don't seem to recall any such creature as you describe."

Mr. Carey yawned very heavily.

"I know," he said then. "Annie! That's it — Annie! Well, well. I wonder what became of her? And there was a fellow named Alf —"

"That Annie Lister, I suppose you mean. Blackish kind of a little thing, with a snippy nose."

"Was she so dark? Well! Ho-hum-m. Wonder what time it is. Must be late."

"You ought to know what happened to her. She sent you an invitation to her wedding, and you always seemed to know when anything happened in the family."

Mr. Carey did not speak.

"You spoke of her only the other night; Wednesday, it was."

Mr. Carey was breathing heavily.

## II

The high tide of Mr. Carey's day came usually between four and five in the afternoon, when he returned from the office of Carey and Wells, Attorneys-at-Law, Warrell, Illinois. The low tide was normally in the morning when he arrived at the office; he had then an exhausting moment of adjustment in which he strove to assume an air of genial and effortless authority in the presence of his smiling energetic junior (aged fifty-two; Mr. Carey was sixty-one). Afterward Mr. Carey invariably felt tempted to clutch his hat, felt as if a tornado had just swept by and carefully left him unhurt. Once out of the building, however, he quickly regained his composure. On the street he felt the distinction of his genteel old-fashioned dress and light youthful cane: a dress which, like the modesty and quiet erudition he had brought from some old village of New York State, was a source of awed uncomprehending pride in the breasts of this little city's inhabitants. "Mr. Carey," the young people would say respectfully, "is a scholar and a gentleman." Older folks asserted more familiarly that old John Carey was honest as the day was long; and in hotel lobbies young and old alike would inform strangers that that well-dressed old gentleman yonder was Judge Carey, the distinguished lawyer. Strangers would appear impressed, and nod as if to say "Of course". Mr. Carey was aware of these compliments; it was their cumulative effect that made the time of his return from town, in the afternoon, the high tide of his day.

But on this afternoon Mr. Carey, of Carey and Wells, rehearsed rather listlessly the man-of-affairs lines he liked usually to recite to his wife. Between brief intervals of thin sunlight the day was gray. The air was still, and neither warm nor cool; the trees drooped forlornly for all their reds and yellows. Little intimate warm smells of earth came up timidly to touch Mr. Carey and

whisper "Must we go?" It was all depressing; so depressing that Mr. Carey's feelings as he turned in at the gate and started up the walk to his cottage were disturbingly like those with which he entered his office at Warrell.

He opened the door, and his depression left him. There facing him was a girl of nineteen or so in a stiff light-colored dress. She had freckles, and black hair, and a soft mouth. She smiled shyly, and blushed; black big eyes made little leaps to his, and fell down, and leapt again.

"Well, well, *well!*" he exclaimed. "If it isn't little Jenny!" And with sudden boldness he seized her limp arms and kissed her, three times. Her mouth was *very* soft.

She gasped and gurgled, blushing more than ever, and drew away. "I just stopped off," she explained. "I'm on my way up to Michigan to see the folks out there." She paused, then went on with shy breathless haste: "And Papa, he always says, 'Don't you never dare go by Warrell without you stop off t' old John Carey's.' So I come."

"Oh," said Mr. Carey with an abrupt resumption of dignity. "So that's why."

"Aw," said Jenny helplessly.

Mrs. Carey sailed smilingly out of shadow to Jenny's defense. "Don't you pay any attention to what he says," she advised.

Jenny grinned, and Mr. Carey, recovering his aplomb, kissed his wife gaily, disposed of hat, cane and gloves, and showed the ladies into the parlor.

"Well, well, trying to surprise us, eh? You little imp!" and he chucked the girl under the chin. "And how are the folks?"

The folks were fine. The hogs and cattle were fine, the year's crops and the weather. Everything was fine. These facts were drawn from Jenny in brief separate statements. Then there was a pause,

"Was there anything serious at the office to-day, dear?" Mrs. Carey inquired.

Mr. Carey frowned slightly at the implication and, from habit, went to the bookshelves and took out a volume.

"Well-l," he said a trifle absently, "nothing *unusually* serious. Some rather complicated matters," he added, turning the pages, "but I believe I left things in pretty fair shape. . . . You will pardon me a moment?"

"Of course."

Mrs. Carey whispered something and she and Jenny tiptoed out.

"Oh, dammit," Mr. Carey wailed, putting his book away. A few seconds he passed in thought, hands on hips. Then he went upstairs; and when he came down in response to the dinner-bell his wife noted, with a pride reminiscent of her girlhood, his vivacity and faultless dress.

"Well, girls," he chirruped, taking Jenny by the shoulders and setting her in a chair, "we'll call it a day, and make it an evening." Jenny blushed and giggled. "As for the law," he continued, "let it take its course. I wash my hands of it. Social duties will keep me at home for the next few days."

"Oh John, dear, I'm so glad. We'll show Jenny the nicest time!"

"But I can't stay," Jenny protested. "The folks kind of expected me to go right on."

"Nonsense," Mr. Carey exclaimed. "If they say anything I'll have the law on them."

Jenny murmured vaguely that she would put them to too much trouble, but Mrs. Carey silenced her. "You'll do us a world of good," she said, "and no trouble at all. Daddy will take the little bed, you know, and you can sleep with me."

Her husband thought of a jocular comment, but he said merely, with an overtone of fought mirth, "Oh, as to

that, my dear, there'll be no trouble at all, no trouble at all." Then sobering, he said grace, very briefly, and helped Jenny to the fried chicken.

### III

The next day was a happy one for the Careys.

No doubt this was due to Mr. Carey's high strategy on the first evening. Finding Jenny timid, he saw at once that she was awed by his reputation for learning and his connection with the law, and promptly put her at ease with absurdly urban questions about crops and stock and farm matters in general. In spite of her determination to be courteous, Jenny laughed; and as Mr. Carey, not minding in the least, laughed too, and Mrs. Carey followed his example, all three of them had a noisy and merry evening.

Mr. Carey was annoyed a little the next morning when he found he was the last up, but at the first sight of Jenny the impulse to laugh returned. Thereafter he laughed at the slightest provocation; even when, feeling that perhaps he looked foolish, he tried to recapture his gravity, a smile would break out on his face, and he would have to think of some pun or prank to account for it.

Still he had moments of gruffness. Teased about his late sleeping, he admitted cheerfully that he had stayed up late, in the library (omitting however the explanation that he had spent the time marking high passages in the poets); but when his wife pursued the subject, solicitously, he became somewhat annoyed.

"I know, dear!" she exclaimed. "It was your pipe!"

Mr. Carey waved his hand irritably, but she failed to notice the gesture.

"You know, Jenny," she continued, "we old folks are creatures of habit. Daddy likes his pipe in the evening, and last night he forgot all about it, and so he was nervous and couldn't sleep. Remember, Jenny," she advised archly, "when your husband gets old, get him a

nice pipe and you'll have no trouble keeping him at home."

Mr. Carey's chair had moved ominously two or three times during this speech. Now he glowered silently at the table for a moment.

"Fact is," he said then in a voice painfully calm and slightly nasal, "I never cared for pipes. Just a whim of Maggie's. Of course," he added hastily, "I like my smoke. But not pipes."

"Why — " gasped Mrs. Carey.

"Rain, I 'xpect," said Mr. Carey grimly. "It's cool, too. Almost chilly. Shouldn't be surprised if we need a fire this evening. Are you warm enough, Jenny?"

"Me? I'm always warm. Why, I run around half dressed lots colder days than this."

"Jenny's so young," observed Mrs. Carey, "she don't feel the cold like us old folks. Her blood's thicker."

"Well, if you're chilly, Maggie, I'll run out and hunt up some coal and kindling." And very ostentatiously he took his coat off and rolled up his sleeves. When Maggie protested that it was wet and he'd get his death of cold, he laughed scornfully and shook his head.

"You — women!" he exclaimed as he swaggered to the door.

But these unpleasant incidents were few. Most of the day passed delightfully; and some moments were, to Mr. Carey at least, priceless.

Once, left alone with Jenny, he rose from his chair, opened two or three of the books he had marked the night before and left on the table, glanced at them, at Jenny, smiled engagingly, picked up one of the books, and began to walk rapidly back and forth.

"I suppose," he said at length to the wondering girl, "you don't get many chances to read, with all the folks around, and the housework to do."

"N-no," said Jenny, twisting her hands and crossing and uncrossing her feet. "Course, we read at school,

and Mamma she makes us read the Bible, and sometimes I look at the paper. But I don't get no time to read, not books, I mean, leastways most of the time."

Still twisting her hands, she gazed at him patiently, ready for the next question.

"That's too bad," said Mr. Carey. He sat down, rubbed his chin, looked at the book again and then at the ceiling and repeated, "That's too bad."

There was a silence, which Jenny ended.

"You know, Mamma, she don't like folks to read when she's around. She says it always makes her fidgety to see a person set and stare at a book when there's always so many things needs doing. She says it's lazy. So I don't read much." She laughed briefly, swallowed, and looked at the wall.

"Well, well," said Mr. Carey without spirit. He opened his book again, closed it, gazed at the floor, looked rather helplessly at Jenny, got up slowly, and resumed walking.

"Papa, he reads," the girl informed him, looking up wide-eyed.

Mr. Carey stopped, cleared his throat, and said "Oh". Then Mrs. Carey came back.

Toward evening the clouds grew heavy, and a sullen wind came up, gusty at first, then loud and insistent. The Careys turned their lights on early, but after supper Mr. Carey (who, laughing down his wife's protests, had gone out and snatched great loads of fuel from the very teeth of rheumatism) put out the lights and drew chairs up to the big stove. Then while Mrs. Carey clapped her hands girlishly and Jenny made little exclamations of delight, he fed wood into the stove until the fire leapt and crackled.

"This," he asserted with deep satisfaction as he settled in his big chair and looked round at the dancing lights and shadows, "is something like it."

"If you'd only light your pipe, dear," said Mrs. Carey. "That's all we need to make it nice and homelike."

"Oh, well," said her husband indulgently, getting up. In a few minutes he was back with a slender briar, its bowl filled and glowing.

Mr. Carey's good humor was put to one more trial. His wife spoke ecstatically of the brightening effect of youth on the homes of old couples, and added, "You know, Jenny, Daddy and I never had any of our own, and —"

A prolonged clattering of stove parts ended her remarks.

There was much cheerful talk of farms and farmers, stating of preferences in trivialities, comment on the superiority of the wood fire to modern heating devices. And there was nonsense and laughter, and delicious silence now and then.

Once in Jenny's absence Mr. Carey remarked that she was an intelligent young woman; a *very* intelligent young woman.

"It's a pity," he continued, and his face for an instant looked almost sad in the fluttering light, "that the splendid young women in our rural districts should be denied access to the, ah, storehouses of learning, of culture, that would, ah — add so much to their natural charm. It is their right," he declared, rather ambiguously.

"Well," said Mrs. Carey, "I don't know as all that would do Jenny much good. Lots of young fellows —"

Fortunately Jenny came in at this point and Mr. Carey did not hear the rest of his wife's words. He began to question the girl about games, talked of the pastimes and songs of his youth, and soon had the women laughing about nothing. It was very cosy in the waving light and shadow, with the sounds of coming storm outside. But suddenly came a crackle and flash, and an earth-shaking burst of thunder. Mrs. Carey cried out and clutched her chair. Jenny screamed and covered her ears, cowering. Mr. Carey converted a start into a leisurely shift of position and laughed a male laugh.

As the echoes rolled away Mrs. Carey sputtered half-articulate exclamations, but her husband did not hear them. He was gazing tenderly at Jenny. In the white glare of the lightning he had seen her face appeal to him, had seen her eyes wide with fear and her lips parted, her white hands clutching her shoulders; and her shriek was still ringing in his ears.

His wife tugged at his shoulder.

"Rain!" she cried against another roar of thunder. "The windows!"

He nodded. She ran one way, he another, to see that all windows were down. It is possible that Mr. Carey shirked his job. Or it may be that he moved with unusual speed. Certainly he came back in a remarkably short time, before his wife; and, intentionally or not, he stopped very close to Jenny and smiled down at her, intently, and as she looked up at him with an expression that was half apology for her fright, half acknowledgment that it still existed, there came another crash, and she jumped and shrieked again.

Mrs. Carey, coming back a few seconds later, found her husband on the arm of Jenny's chair, holding the girl to his breast and chuckling happily.

"Ha-ha-ah," Mrs. Carey cried playfully, "so *that's* what goes on in my absence." She shook a finger at them.

Her husband laughed in wicked glee. Jenny, however, ignored the play.

"Oo-ooh," she said, clasping her hands. "I was s' scared!"

Obviously her terror was real. Mrs. Carey, contemplating it, forgot her own; she petted the girl, mothered her, finally took her off to bed. Mr. Carey, who had sat all this time on the chair arm smiling at Jenny's head and patting her shoulder, demurred; but he was still in a trance and could not protest effectively. He rose when Jenny did; his hand lingered on her shoulder a moment,

and slid reluctantly down her arm as she moved toward the stairs; and they left him standing there with a half-smile, unaware probably that his wife had just kissed him. While the fire lasted he sat in Jenny's chair, his eyes closed or half open, waiting for thunder peals and listening avidly for the cries from upstairs. Only when the worst of the storm was over, when the cries came no longer, did he move from the stove and its smoldering embers.

He stretched, stood on tiptoe and stretched his arms upward. He swung his arms, walked briskly, in the dark, while thunder muttered and rain splashed and the wind played wildly on the helpless trees. Once he tried to waltz, but a flash caught him facing a mirror, and he stopped. Later, though, he began again, back to mirror, and danced manfully until his shins and knees were bruised in many collisions with unseen furniture.

The big clock struck one. Mr. Carey rose, and set and wound his alarm. Then he sat by a window and gazed out at the night. He was tired. His head seemed to bob up and down; he had smoked three pipes that evening. Still he remained by the window, cuddling himself and gazing out. Now and then he would get up and pace the floor, thoughtfully. . . .

Mr. Carey started; he had been nodding. The storm was over; the rain had stopped; water dripped mournfully from the drain pipes. The room was cold; Mr. Carey shivered, rubbed his shoulders, yawned, and got ready for bed.

The alarm clock did not fail Mr. Carey. Very early it tore him from sleep. He silenced it wrathfully, then sat up shivering to stare at the gray sky and rain-soaked ground swept by a chill wind. But presently he straightened, worked his facial muscles vigorously, drew a deep breath, and got up with alacrity.

Mrs. Carey, coming down as usual at six, found the fire blazing and her husband cheerfully slicing bacon.

"Fine weather," he pronounced with gusto, forestalling anxious protestations. "Nothing like a raw morning to put a man in fine fettle. Sets the blood stirring. A masculine morning, I call it. A fine, vigorous morning."

He was dressed astonishingly, in old trousers and a flannel shirt open at the throat. His wife stared, but he talked so much that she found no opportunity for comment.

Jenny, tousled and sleepy-eyed, appeared at the head of the staircase. Mr. Carey waited at the foot of the steps rubbing his hands and looking up mischievously.

"Well," he called out as she came slowly down, "I hope you had a quiet night, my dear."

She smiled sleepily and moved over to the wash-stand.

"Oo-oo," she grumbled. "It was aw-ful! - all night. 'I was s' scared, with that lightning an' — everything.'"

Mr. Carey shouted gleefully.

"I heard you all right. I heard you. Needn't tell me. I know all about it. Why, you screamed so much I couldn't hear the thunder."

Jenny turned.

"Did I holler s' much?" she inquired. Mr. Carey started; he had been studying her as she bent over the stand pouring water. "I know I hollered," she admitted, as she turned back and dipped her hands in the basin. "but I didn't think I was keepin' you awake. I always holler, at lightning and thunder. It ain't the lightning s' much, it's the thunder; still the lightning scares me too, sometimes. I don't know which it is. Both I reckon." She laughed a little. "Did I keep you awake?" she asked solicitously, turning again.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Carey. He's only teasing you. People think he's solemn, but he's the worst old tease!" As she passed with a pancake turner she laid a hand affectionately on his shoulder and smiled very tenderly. He turned away abruptly, as if he had just thought of something.

At breakfast Jenny announced that she might leave that evening. She expected to hear from friends; they had invited her to visit them whenever she passed that way. Mr. Carey became thoughtful.

"Well, well," he murmured. "That's too bad. And you're going out to the Fergusons' for dinner to-day, too, aren't you?"

Jenny nodded. "Mamma says I got to. Mrs. Ferguson, she made Mamma promise when we come here, any of us, we'd come and see her, so I guess I better go to-day, or maybe I wouldn't get there at all."

There was a heavy silence. Mrs. Carey went out to the kitchen for coffee.

"So you don't read," said Mr. Carey, more to himself than to Jenny.

"No," said Jenny, somewhat surprised. "Not much."

"I wonder," said Mr. Carey, turning his head very charmingly, "if your — mamma — objects to shows."

Jenny laughed. "Well," she said, "I don't know. I don't think she thinks it's right to go to 'em, but Papa, he says some shows is all right, so I don't think she — so she don't say anything."

"We-ell," said Mr. Carey, winking at her, "I guess she'd trust my judgment. Wouldn't she? You ask her, and some day —"

Mrs. Carey came back from the kitchen.

The rest of the morning was depressing. Jenny and Mrs. Carey kept up a fragmentary conversation. Mr. Carey walked the floor with lowered head. About ten he went upstairs, and came down later fully dressed.

"Since you've decided to leave us for a few hours, Jenny," he said with a reproachful smile, "I think I'll run into town. I'll come back this afternoon. You'll be back with us early, I hope?"

She would. At least she would try.

"And take the late train, if you *must* go to-night. I'll see you off." He tilted her head back, looked intently

at her face, turned suddenly to his wife, checked her questions with a brief kiss, and hurried out.

It was late when he returned. The afternoon was warm and still; the clouds, which seemed to shut in the oppressive air, shut out the light; only in the west were they slightly colored. Mr. Carey perspired as he hurried up the walk.

He stopped. His wife was at the door.

"Too late," she said, smiling gently. Then she noticed a certain tensity in his expression. At first he had looked away from her; now he looked *at* her, sharply.

"Why John, dear, what's the matter?"

"Too late!" he echoed in a thin voice. He cleared his throat and demanded, "What do you mean?"

"Why, Jenny . . . she's gone. She couldn't wait any longer. I asked the young man — he called for her — I asked if he couldn't stay for supper, but he said he'd have to go."

Mr. Carey had turned away, and was staring across the fields. He pulled out a soiled handkerchief, wearily, and mopped his face.

"What's the matter, dear? Is there — What's wrong?"

She stepped down to the walk and laid a hand on his shoulder. He moved away impatiently.

"Nothing — nothing," he said. "Only — " He stopped, then added with a trace of animation, "Well, we'll have to manage without her. *You'll* go, I suppose?"

"Where, dear?" He was still looking away.

"Why, to the show. Warrell. Some romantic nonsense. The women like it."

"Oh, John!" She made a move toward him, but stopped. "You've bought the tickets already, I suppose. Shall I ask one of the neighbors in Jenny's place?"

"Er — no. That is — Well, the fact is, I didn't get

three. I mean, the truth is, I wasn't sure — thought I might be busy this evening."

"But — "

"It's late, Maggie. If you want to go, run in and get supper. I want to look at this fence."

When she had gone he looked around cautiously, then took a package from his pocket, unwrapped it, removed a folded paper, returned the package to the pocket and tore up the paper and carefully trampled it in the soft ground. He sighed then, and looked away again across the fields. Presently, after another look behind him, he took a small case from his pocket as if to throw it away; but changed his mind, opened the case, regarded it gloomily a moment, and put it back.

It was a full cigarette case.

In the dark little hall, after he had taken off his hat and put his cane away, Mr. Carey realized that his wife was talking to him from the kitchen. How long? Probably since she heard him close the door. She often talked at him from some distant room, expecting no reply. He caught a few words above the lively clatter of pans and the sound of frying.

"— nice young man. I kind of thought when she wrote that letter the other day it was something more than ordinary social duty. It's an eighteen mile drive. I'll bet he keeps her there with his folks a while, too, before she goes on to Michigan."

She left the kitchen. Gone to the porch, probably.

Mr. Carey stood in the dusk of the hallway, leaning against the wall. The library door was ajar. He gazed vacantly at a gray streak of light which came through from some window. In there was the big stove. And the chair.

He moved to the door, and pushed it open, gently. The room was in shadow, sharply still.

## STRENGTH OF GRASS

By F. S. PUTNAM

All the long hours I have been cutting down  
With the sharp scythe of my will,  
The tangled grasses of memory.

As I went down the hill of the day they lay behind me,  
Fading and dying,  
Their swaying beauty in vanquished heaps.

The great white star-daisies of love,  
The slender blue sprays of hope,  
Fell with the grass, and died.

And only pain  
Was their fragrance that lingered after my passing.

But tonight  
The little pale gold wind of evening  
Caressed my hair. I turned  
And looked back, and the grass  
And flowers were swaying in the summer air  
As if my scythe had never touched their dream.

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## TWO POEMS

By NORA B. CUNNINGHAM

### THE NOVELIST

All human love and joy and agony  
Are to his mind material for books,  
As the bright flash of wings across the sky  
Suggests the smell of broiling birds to cooks.

## PORTENTS

There is a yellow moon far down the west;  
A crescent moon entangled in the hedge,  
Shedding faint light upon the rocky ledge  
Where once we sat in summer, and now rest,  
Long-parted hands close-held, eyes seeking eyes  
In mingled wistfulness and doubt and fear. . . .  
Is love, too, changed with changes of the year,  
Or wears it yet the dear familiar guise . . . ?  
. . . Pallid and still lies the half-frozen pool  
Whose ripples glittered in the August moon —  
There will be solid ice across it soon,  
And winds to which these winds are merely cool. . . .  
— Oh, put your arms about me — hold me tight!  
— The sinking moon . . . the frozen pool . . . the  
night . . . !

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## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Roland English Hartley is a resident of San Francisco. "The Battleground" is one of his first published stories.

Nora B. Cunningham lives at Chanute, Kansas. Poems of hers have appeared in earlier volumes of *THE MIDLAND*, and she is soon to be represented in other literary magazines.

Bertha Helen Crabbe sends this story from Far Rockaway, Long Island. Her work has appeared only in a few of the modern magazines.

Charles Cain, of Chicago, has contributed stories to *The Wave* and *The Shart Set*.

F. S. Putnam is the pseudonym of a young Illinois writer.

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